

SHIPBUILDING

DUXBURY SHIPBUILDING DAYS

By Fisher Ames

So long as pines and white oaks were the prerequisite for shipbuilding as in Duxbury's heyday, America rather more than held her own. There were several reasons for the decline of our proud prowess on the high seas beside the change from wood to iron vessels: The serious handicap Lloyds imposed upon wooden ships by granting a lower rate of insurance to those built of iron, our back-firing protective tariff, the increasing disinclination of men to serve as sailors and the more remunerative fields for investment offered capital right at home. As for example only 23 miles of railway were in operation in 1830, while the country impatiently awaited development. Even the turnpike roads had not been built to any great extent. In the later years of the 18th century everything that was moved at all was moved by water.

Ox-Cart Days

Goods were shipped to the various ports to which the

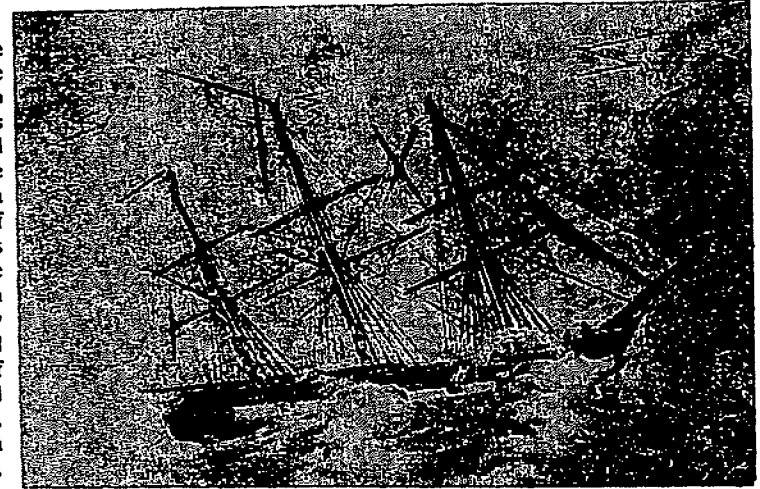
creaking ox-carts slowly came from the inland towns. Here was a business of which we had a complete monopoly thanks to an Act of 1789 - and later ones to which it gave birth - restricting all coast-wise trade to American owned vessels. With foreign competition knocked from this economic ring the tonnage increased from 68,607 tons in 1789 to 5,441,688 in 1905.

Duxbury had its share of a trade that extended from Maine to Florida and down to the islands of the Caribbean. Her outboard ships carried dried and salted codfish, pickled mackerel, salt beef and salt pork, boards and shingles, barrel staves and hoops, cheese, butter and candles. Possibly some rum as well to flavor the cargo. The homeward cargoes always included such staples as molasses, sugar, coffee, cocoa and cotton. When a captain could pick up some indigo also he considered himself lucky.

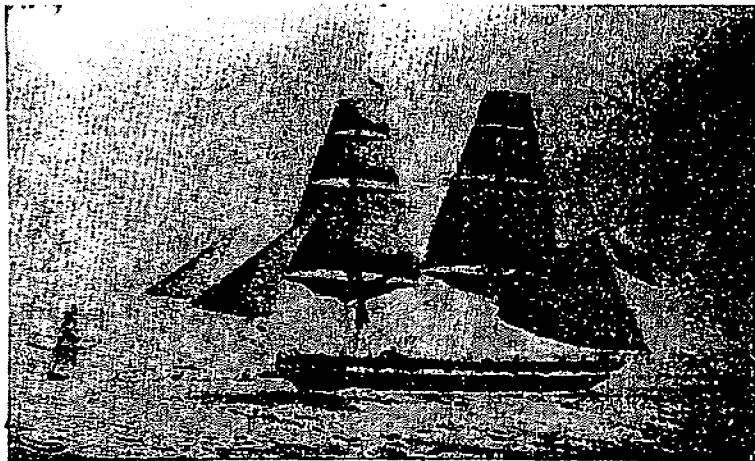
Breakfasts in Old Days

These inventories represent the trade of earlier days before smoke from great factories began to stain the New England air. It was the trade of an agricultural people. Most of the items are good to eat or drink. To look a little further into this matter of comestibles - about 150 years deeper - Duxbury menus were then of this order: Breakfast; tea or coffee, brown bread usually with butter, salt or fresh fish fried or broiled; Dinner: one or more of the following dishes; roots and herbs, salted beef or pork boiled, fresh fish boiled or fried with pork, salt fish boiled, shell fish, pork baked with beans, Indian pudding and frequently tea or coffee. Wild fowl in autumn and winter when they could be procured. "Fresh butcher's meat" was rarely served more often than 12 times a year. For supper; tea or coffee, fish as at breakfast, cheese, cakes made of flour, gingerbread and pies of several sorts. Plenty of hearty food certainly, but what became of the vegetables? Did they call a cabbage an herb and carrots and turnips roots?

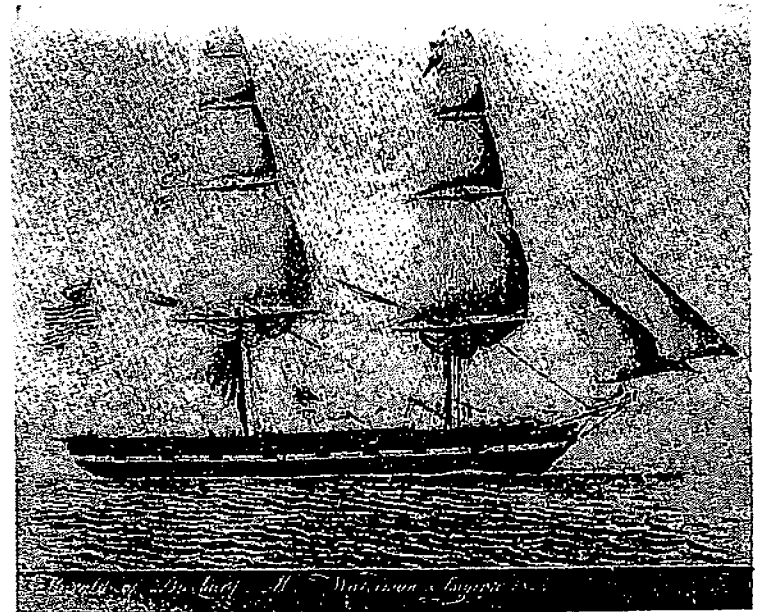
Gradually Duxbury's skilled workmen were drawn off to busier centers. The Westons, Soules, Spragues, Sampsons, Drews, Delanos, Chandlers and all the rest of their salty ilk no longer went down to the sea in ships. The fishing craft of a later date, poor relations of the stately brigs and barks and ships, had their day also and vanished in turn. Duxbury Bay ceased to be a highway of commerce and the only prow that ruffle its waters now are those of small pleasure boats.



On a sand bar off Cape Horn is this ship with its captain, Alexander Wadsworth. Elsewhere in this anniversary issue are stories of Wadsworth and of his home on Washington St.

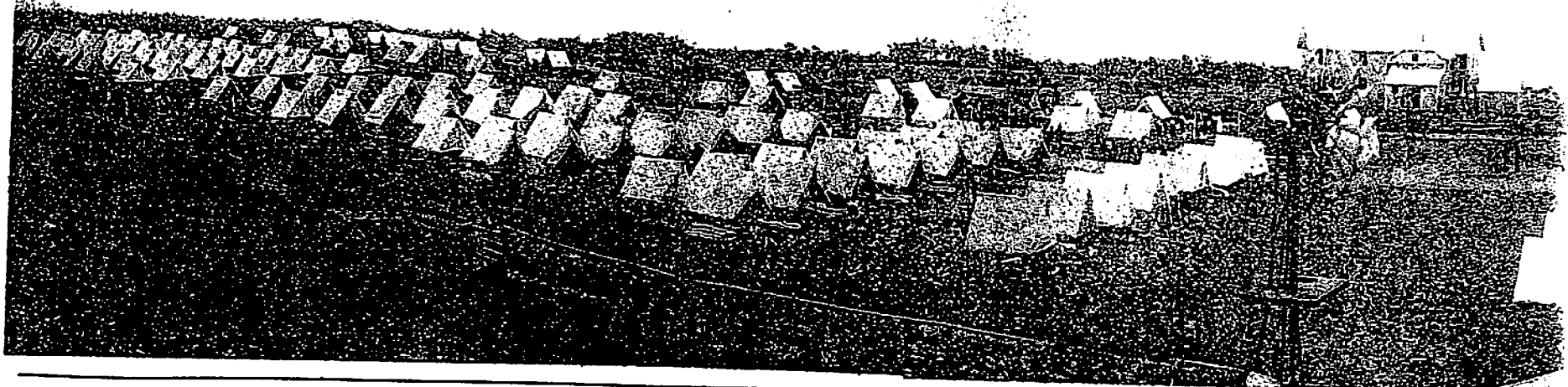


The Brig Smyrna of Duxbury, captained by Seth Sprague, was built by Ezra Weston. By permission of the Sultan of Turkey, it was the first ship to fly the American flag in the Black Sea.

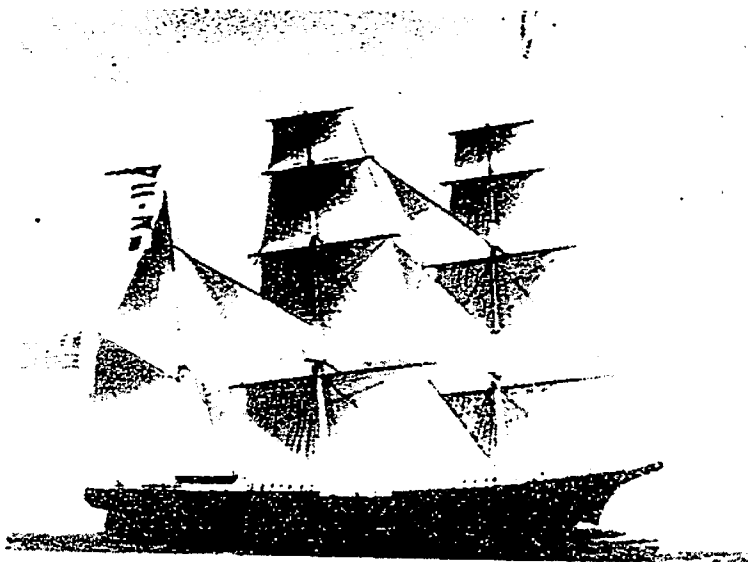


In 1824, M. Waterman was captain of the "Herald" of Duxbury

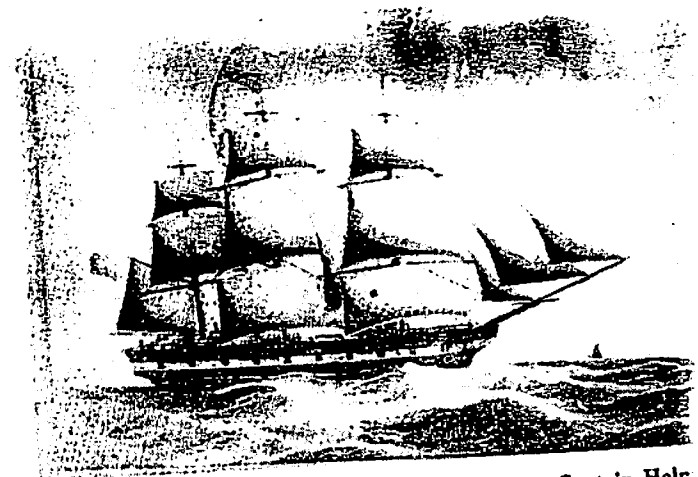
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Camp of 5th Mass. Volunteers



Captain Waterman of Duxbury was at the helm of this ship. Can you read the flags?



The "Herculean" of Duxbury was skippered by Captain Holt.

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Types of Vessels

At their best Duxbury vessels were no ocean greyhounds to look at. They were short and thick through the waist and hips - to give the word a nautical twist - but they were sturdily and honestly built, living up to the good reputation of the packet ships for outlasting the swift fancy Clippers. In the old custom-house records most of them are set down as square-sterned, without figureheads, with possibly one in 50 showing a coquettish elliptic rear. More often, though still not common, was the decorative touch of the figurehead, in most cases literally a head - almost always feminine. The ship, Powhattan, owned by Thomas Herrick and Nathaniel Winsor Jr., more appropriately bore that of an Indian chief. It was understandable that the large square-rigged vessels thought their lordly tonnage entitled them to such adornments, but Ahira Wadsworth and James Southworth Jr., thought their 71 foot schooner, Catherine, equally entitled to the honor. She was I think the only one of her day and class to have one.

Even the largest Duxbury ships were well under 200 feet in length. The biggest that ever hit the waters here was officially registered thus: Hope, ship. Built

1841, Duxbury. Length, 159 feet 3 inches; breadth 34 feet, 9 1/4 inches; depth 17 feet, 4 5/8 inches; tonnage 880. Two decks, 3 masts, square stern, no galleries, a billethead. Master, Truman Soule. Owner, Ezra Weston. A billethead is an ornamental carving frequently and economically used as a substitute for a figurehead.

Briggs and barks were usually somewhat under 100 feet in length, schooners running from 50-75 feet. These of course were the early vessels. Small compared with those that came later, it must be remembered they were in the nature of pioneers, built to fit their waters and the purses of their owners, in the majority of cases men of very moderate means. They did well and bravely what they were called upon to do and laid the foundation for many a comfortable fortune.

When the vessels from the more northerly deep-water ports began to stretch their keels even the smallest of them, the schooners, sometimes could show as much length, or even more, than Weston's full-rigged ship "Hope." Newburyport's "Cox and Green" was longer by 5 full feet. The "Lucy E. Friend" from the same port was 147 feet long; the George D. Edmonds of Boston, 158.7 feet. All of the fleet

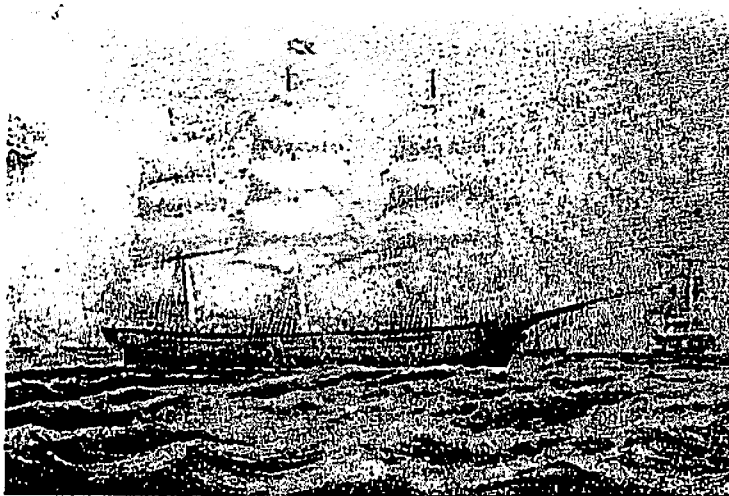
from Maine shores were big and like those just mentioned they were three-masters. Duxbury seems never to have added the third mast to her schooners. The earliest recorded three-master was the "Harmony," 1799, Captain Price; no information as to where she was built, and described as "Danish Bottom." She was lost on the passage between New Haven and Surinam, so Connecticut may have been the State of her "birth."

First Four-master in N.E.

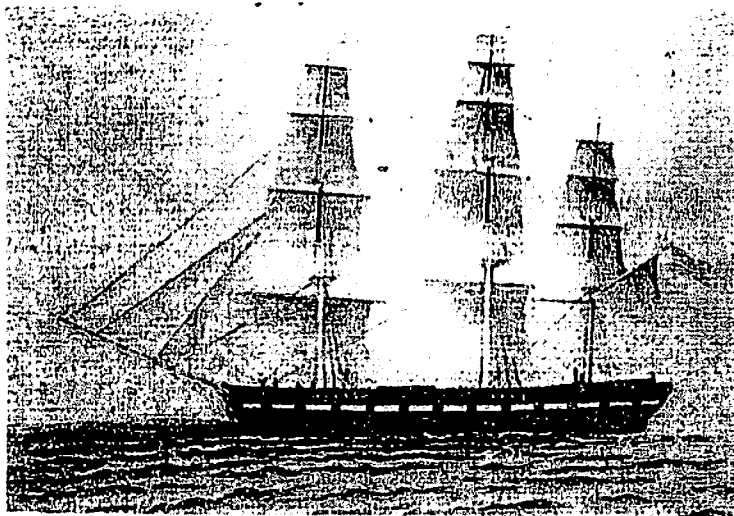
Any three-masted schooner prior to 1850 ranks as an early example. The 995 ton schooner, "William L. White," of Bath, Maine, 1880, is usually credited with being the first four-master in New England. Connecticut, however, disputes the claim. It maintains that the first was the "Weybosset," built at Mystic, Conn., in 1879 and gives the record in American Lloyd's Register as proof.

Duxbury vessels occasionally had a single owner, frequently 2 or 3, an owner often serving as master. In many cases they were members of the same family, or closely related. It was very different with most of the larger craft of a later date which were owned by groups of share holders. Thirty-one held the "George D. Edmonds," 38 the "Cox and Green" and the Customs put down 23 against the "Maud Snare" of Bangor with, "balance of owners unknown." And so it went.

Such crafts were as impersonal as department stores or coal mines. Many investors never saw the vessels of which they were part owners. At Duxbury the contact was close and personal between vessel and owners, between vessel and all the town indeed, which shared vicariously in its luck, good or bad. The very names of many show how intimate were the partnerships: "Two Brothers," owned by the Drew family; the "Three Josephs," Joseph Cushman, Joseph Drew and Joseph White; the "Eight Sons," Levi Sampson and David Cushman; the "Four Brothers," Seth Sprague; and all the "Two Friends," owned by Ezra Weston Jr., and Abraham Barker, of Philadelphia.



Captain Sampson was at the helm of this Duxbury ship, "Thayer"



Captain of the "Oneco" of Duxbury was Captain Drew